

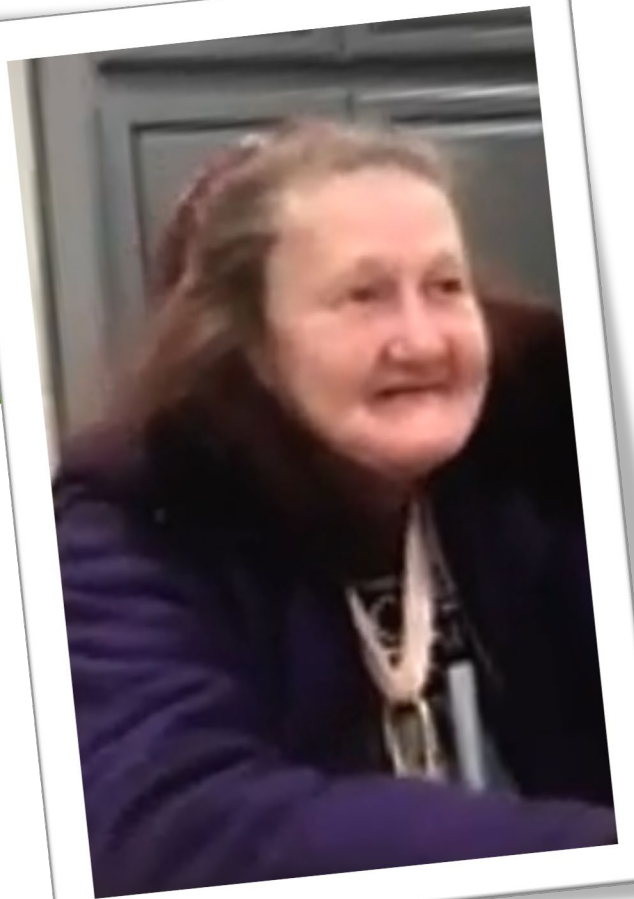
Pathways to Competitive Integrated Employment

Sandy H.'s Story

Meet Sandy, a hardworking, kind-hearted individual who has spent much of her adult life working in environments designed to support people with disabilities. Outside of work, Sandy lives in a group home with four roommates, supported by ResCare. She enjoys visiting her brother, watching *SpongeBob*, and listening to music in her room—a pastime she misses at work due to workplace rules. “I like music, but we can’t listen to it while working,” she says with a shrug.

Background

Sandy is a dedicated individual with a history in supported work environments. She lives in a group home and enjoys simple pleasures like music and time with family. For 25 years, she worked in a sheltered workshop, transitioning to an hourly wage two years ago. Seeking new opportunities, she joined Chore Time Brock (CTB), assembling poultry systems for a global market. Supported by on-site staff, she thrives in the structured environment, producing up to 500 parts daily. While initially



hesitant about change, Sandy now feels comfortable and valued, finding contentment in her routine, and demonstrating the positive impact of supported employment.

Finding Purpose on the Job

For 25 years, Sandy worked at a sheltered workshop run by Cardinal Services, doing assembly work at piece rates. Two years ago, when Cardinal phased out use of the subminimum wage certificate, she transitioned to earning \$7.25 an hour. While Sandy appreciated the consistency of her workshop role, she was introduced to a new opportunity working at CTB, a large manufacturing company in Milford, Indiana.

At CTB, Sandy is part of a supported team that assembles poultry watering systems for a global market. This transition is part of an initiative to integrate individuals like Sandy into competitive

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employment settings, with support staff on-site to ease the shift. Sandy works Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., completing tasks that require focus and precision. "I like the work," Sandy says. "It keeps my hands busy. I can make 500 parts a day, but I try to do more if I can." Despite the routine, Sandy admits the change was challenging. "It's kind of different than what I'm used to. I feel comfortable now, but it was scary at first."

Sandy doesn't currently have plans to explore other jobs or career paths. For her, the consistency and familiarity of CTB feel right. "I'm happy where I'm at," she says simply. Her story is a reminder that successful transitions to community employment are about more than just finding a job—it's about creating a supportive environment where people feel valued, safe, and capable of thriving in their own way. As Sandy says, "It's a good thing to try."

Navigating Challenges

Transportation has been one of the biggest hurdles for Sandy and her team. Initially reliant on cabs, there were delays and reliability issues. Now, Cardinal provides transportation via a company van, ensuring Sandy and her coworkers arrive on time.

Additionally, Sandy's comfort with routine has made it difficult for her to imagine taking on a different job. "I don't want to change jobs," she says. "I'm happy where I'm at. I know what I'm doing here."

There's also a financial balancing act for individuals like Sandy, whose earnings are carefully monitored to ensure they don't jeopardize essential benefits. "Even if you explain it, there's still a fear of losing

benefits," Norma notes, emphasizing the need for ongoing education and support for both workers and their families.

Ingredients for Success

- **Ongoing Supports:** Sandy attributes much of her success to the support of her job coach, Connie, who helps her stay organized and teaches skills like time management. "Connie checks the parts and gives us numbers on a piece of paper," Sandy explains. Norma, a program coordinator, has also been instrumental in guiding Sandy through the transition from the workshop to CTB. She helps Sandy explore potential career interests, such as working in a bakery or beauty shop, although Sandy remains unsure about taking on something new. "If I could have Connie with me, I might feel better about trying something else," Sandy admits.

- **Tenacity:** Sandy's dedication shines through her consistent production of up to 500 parts daily, Monday through Friday. Despite initial challenges, she now finds comfort and joy in her work, exemplifying the success of supported employment initiatives.

Getting to and from work presented a significant challenge for Sandy and her team. Initially experiencing unreliable cab services, now they benefit from consistent and timely transportation provided by Cardinal through a company van. This allows Sandy to focus on job tasks and arrive at work on time.

Words of Wisdom

Sandy has simple but meaningful advice for anyone considering community employment:

- **Be Kind:** "Don't say anything mean. Be nice to everybody."
- **Stay Focused:** "Just stay busy doing your job. It helps you not get in trouble."

- Ask for Help: "It's okay to ask for help. Connie helps me when I have questions."



With funding from the **Indiana Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services**